



**KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE**  
**Assessment and Analysis of Euthanasia Practices at**  
**King County Animal Care and Control**

Report No. 2009-04

A performance audit of King County Animal Care and Control (KCACC) was mandated by the King County Council in response to concerns about KCACC's euthanasia policies and practices. The overall audit objective was to evaluate selected euthanasia practices at KCACC shelters and compare them to model practices. Dr. Annette Rauch, Tufts University, conducted the audit under contract to the King County Auditor's Office.

The audit found that KCACC's protocols and criteria for animal behavior-related euthanasia are consistently applied but the use of medical assessment criteria is inconsistent. KCACC's euthanasia process is generally consistent with accepted practices and animals are handled gently and carefully, although KCACC's dosing of euthanasia medication is excessive. In addition, documentation of euthanasia decision-making and treatment decisions is incomplete resulting in inaccurate information for management planning and transparency of decision-making. Finally, KCACC's euthanasia rate calculation is not fully consistent with King County Code. While KCACC staff has made improvements, such as lowering the rate of euthanasia, the audit provides recommendations in a number of areas to improve euthanasia decision-making, protocols, and suggestions to adopt additional indicators of shelter success.

### **Background**

King County's Animal Care and Control (KCACC) program operates within the Records and Licensing Services (RALS) Division of the Department of Executive Services. KCACC provides animal shelter, pet licensing, and law enforcement field services throughout King County. KCACC is staffed by 45.6 full-time equivalent employees, and the 2009 budget is approximately \$5.6 million. As this report was being finalized, the King County Executive announced plans to discontinue King County's animal control services effective January 2010.

### **Audit Objectives and Findings**

The performance audit evaluated euthanasia practices at KCACC shelters. Specific audit objectives were to:

1. Evaluate existing euthanasia protocols, including criteria used by KCACC to determine whether an animal should be euthanized. Determine whether KCACC protocols are consistent with best practices.
2. Review existing KCACC euthanasia procedures and controls. Determine whether procedures include sufficient controls over decision-making and record-keeping responsibilities. Determine whether procedures are consistent with best practices.
3. Identify indicators that can be supported by the existing Chameleon data system to monitor and manage euthanasia.

### **Principal Audit Findings:**

- KCACC's euthanasia decision-making protocols are consistently applied, although the behavior assessment criteria and schedule for conducting behavior assessments are lacking. In addition, use of medical assessment criteria is inconsistent, as there is no clear protocol for deciding which animals receive care and which animals are euthanized. Finally, protocols for KCACC's feral cat program are not consistent with best practices.
- Generally the process KCACC uses for euthanasia is consistent with accepted practices, animals are handled gently and carefully, and the documentation relating to the use of euthanasia medication is accurate. However, KCACC's dosing of euthanasia medication is excessive. Further, both electronic and written documentation of euthanasia decision-making and treatment decisions is not complete. This results in inaccurate information for management planning and transparency of decision-making.
- KCACC's approach to calculation of a euthanasia rate is not fully consistent with the direction in King County Code. Other approaches, such as calculating a euthanasia rate based on known outcomes for animals or monitoring a rolling live release rate, may be more indicative of shelter success.

### **Executive Response**

Of the 12 audit recommendations, the County Executive concurred with 8 and partially concurred with 4 of the recommendations.